

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 146

UD 020 081

AUTHOR Stewart, Dorothy Granberry
TITLE A Panorama of the Desegregation of Historically Black Public Colleges.
PUB DATE 1 Sep 79
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (New York, NY, September 1, 1979)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Colleges; Black Culture; *Black Education; Blacks; *College Integration; Higher Education

ABSTRACT

The civil rights struggle has created different perspectives on the place and role of black public colleges in American education today. It has been recommended that these schools, following the public school example, be absorbed or "engulfed" by the white educational structure. This recommendation reinforces the view that black institutions are, per se, inferior. However, black colleges are valuable in assuring blacks continued access to all aspects of higher education and recognition of the black perspective in the American mainstream. If these schools are to be desegregated, that process must be accomplished by a sensitivity to the educational needs and social aims of the black community. (Author/WP)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

A Panorama of the Desegregation of Historically
Black Public Colleges

Dorothy Granberry Stewart, Ph.D.
Psychology Department
Tennessee State University
Nashville, Tennessee

ABSTRACT

An analysis of the desegregation process involving the historically black public colleges in the United States is presented. The paper argues that: 1) there is a relationship between the dismantling of the dual system in higher education and the realization of a pluralistic society; 2) the realization of a pluralistic society is related to the nature of the role of the historically black colleges in the desegregated society; and 3) the consequences of policy in this area have not been directed toward assuring a viable role for these colleges and universities.

UD 020 081

A Panorama of the
Desegregation of Historically Black Public Colleges

—

The social changes in the United States resulting from the 1954 Supreme Court decision declaring the separate but equal doctrine to be unconstitutional and the passage and enforcement of federal civil rights legislation have brought to the forefront the question of the appropriate role of the historically black public college in the desegregated society. The views on this matter range from the perspective that these institutions are anachronisms with no justifiable place in the desegregated world to the position that they are a major resource for the education of students from all strata of the society. A review of the policies developed and actions taken relative to the resolution of this issue reflects the continued pervasiveness of the two contradictory goals of American higher education - universal education and the identification of education elites through race, income and sex.

Skepticism about the fairness of the marketplace and belief in the democratic ideal formed the basis for the first goal while the second evolved in response to the capitalist economic structure which produces and must maintain structural inequalities (Riggan, 1978). The demands of the expanding service sector of the nation's economy are consistent with the first goal and have consequently contributed significantly to the massive growth of Americans as consumers of higher education. Today, accessibility to some form of college education is theoretically available to most persons with a high school diploma.

However, barriers still remain. For example, the National Advisory Committee on Black Higher Education and Black Colleges and Universities (1979) report that blacks are less likely to graduate from high school, for a number of reasons, thus effectively reducing their actual access. While student access admittedly has improved there remain the question of entryway into and impact on the power realms of higher education. For the most part power distributions in this area remain basically unaltered and firmly entrenched.

The aim of this is threefold: 1) to demonstrate the relationship between dismantling of the dual system in higher education and the creation of a viable, pluralistic education system; 2) to show that the realization of this end is intricately related to the role of the historically black colleges in desegregated state higher education systems; and 3) to demonstrate that the consequences of policy in this area generally have not been directed toward this end because of two factors: a) the overriding view in the society in general and specifically in academia that the historically black public colleges are innately inferior enterprises (Wright, 1970 Jencks and Riseman, 1967); and b) professional insulation and resistance to the broadening of the existing educational mode.

Desegregation and a Pluralistic Education System

In the American ethos higher education is an avenue for upward mobility. It is also a massive, decisively public, corporate industry (Riggan, 1978) with ties to major economic and political units. It is the primary source of skilled manpower, a major employer, a pipeline for federal and corporate dollars into local and state economies, as well as, the principal site where knowledge is created, expanded and transmitted (Tollett, 1971). Higher education is an important part of the service sector of the nation's economy (Fuller, 1978), a

sector which has continuously grown in importance since the late 19th century. Consequently, higher education is an influential institution in defining the character of the American social order.

Public higher education had its beginning prior to the Civil War, however, it received a major boost from the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862. The purpose of this act was to democratize American higher education by educating the industrial classes (Schuck, 1972). However, black Americans, for the most part were excluded from this democratization as the colleges created with these funds in the South, where most blacks were then located, came to be socially sanctioned white preserves. In 1890, the U.S. Congress passed the Second Morrill Act authorizing the creation of black land grant colleges. The 16 colleges developed under this act joined 19 other 4-year public black colleges to make up the thirty-five historically black public colleges and universities that up until a decade or so ago educated most black Americans and never barred any person on the basis of race.

According to Bowles and DeCosta (1971) these black public colleges, with a few exceptions, developed without any genuine contact and communication with the established institutions of white American higher education. A consequence of this was the development of two distinct and separate systems of education with important ideological and political differences. Bowles and DeCosta note that the black system was of American education, but not in it, despite a close physical resemblance. In education as in other social arenas the dictate was that blacks be denied first class citizenship.

In this vein it is not surprising that the knowledge base in the United States still does not accurately reflect the history and perspectives of black Americans although the struggle for black studies during the 1960's and early 1970's did make inroads.

The continued existence of the racially biased, narrow perspective characteristic of much of higher education is outmoded in a pluralistic society such as the United States. Not only does it short change black Americans, it also denies white Americans the opportunity for broadened experiences and the incorporation of the rich diversity of a multi-group society into their world view. Equitable desegregation in higher education has the potential to correct this failure.

Despite general support for desegregation, the prevailing view relative to it is that the solution lies primarily in black students' access to institutions from which they were formerly excluded (Wiggins, 1966). Certainly, universal accessibility is essential. However, accessibility by itself implies acceptance of the traditional knowledge base and model of American education, entities which continue to lend support to racist ideologies and perspectives. What must occur is a transition in all colleges and universities, not merely recruitment and acceptance of students regardless of race but a redefinition of the knowledge base itself. American higher education must begin to move toward preparing students for a desegregated world (Wright, 1970). This means both black and white students, for while blacks were undoubtedly injured by their being denied full citizenship, so were whites, for as the saying goes when you build fences you keep others out but you also fence yourself in.

The Role of the Historically Black Public College

Accessibility without power is merely the computer age version of the old order. The nature of the role designated to the historically black public college in desegregated systems will contribute greatly to the extent to which this is avoided. Jencks and Riseman (1967) in their assessment of black colleges argue that these institutions, unlike white ethnic colleges, were not founded on the basis of a cultural quarrel with the predominately Anglo-Saxon culture and therefore appear to have little reason for continued existence in light of desegregation.

Such an argument appears valid on the surface. However, if we view the public black colleges from the perspective of the unique oppression of black Americans and the more than century long expansion of American higher education a somewhat different picture emerges. The obvious becomes apparent. Black Americans, unlike white ethnics, had to establish their right to higher education before addressing the issue of the character of that education.

The century long expansion of the education enterprise has provided opportunities for black Americans to advance their struggle against oppression. The nature of the immediate goal sought differed at each stage of this process. The expansions of the late 19th century led to the creation of public institutions that performed the same functions for the black masses as the 1862 and other public colleges did for whites. The expansion of the 1920's sowed the seeds for the initiation of the move for black student access to all public higher education in the 1930's. This latter move was converted into a concentrated push following World War II and culminated in theoretically open access in the 1960's.

During the 1960's higher education experienced its greatest growth as well as initiated large scale desegregation (Wiggins, 1966). For black Americans one of the paramount issues emerging from this period and a step beyond accessibility is the question of the power to control the destiny of black students in the education enterprise. While access allows entry it by no means insures exit. It follows then that the issue at hand must focus on the character and direction of higher education. It must call into question the adequacy of the 18th century education model for a pluralistic 20th century United States.

The Consequences of Policy

Since the 1954 Supreme Court decision there has been public discussion of the eventual fate of the historically black public colleges, although no clearly articulated policy has ever surfaced.

It appears that the prevailing assumption was that some form of the engulfment model utilized in public school desegregation would be followed. This model derives from the definition of desegregated as majority white (Pettigrew, 1969), a definition which effectively precluded little power redistribution.

The apparent reasoning underlying this failure to articulate a policy was that with desegregation the black schools would no longer have a monopoly on black students and faculty, especially the more able, and would at the same time be unable to attract whites in sufficient numbers to offset this loss. Thus, they could be easily and justifiably converted to junior colleges, technical schools or merged into the formerly white colleges and universities.

Whenever existing circumstances have not appeared to support this plan attempts have been made to conveniently alter them in order to insure the completion of the scenario. For example, Egerton (1971) reports that of the 14 historically black public colleges with direct competition from a nearby predominantly white institution, six are competing with schools created by their state since 1964. Table 1 shows these schools, their competition and dates of creation.

Table 1 About Here

When the creation of competition was not necessary, moves were made to eliminate any competitive edge the black colleges may have possessed. For example, the Florida A&M University Law School, created in 1947 in order to continue the exclusion of blacks from the University of Florida, was closed in 1967 to clear the way for a new law school at Florida State, its white

Table 1. Predominantly White Public Colleges Created Since 1964

Predominantly White College	Date of Creation as 4 year college	Predominantly Black College	Date of Creation as 4 year college
1. Univ. of Ala. at Huntsville	1969	Ala. A&M	1939
2. Auburn Univ. at Montgomery	1968	Ala. State	1929
3. Armstrong State College	1964	Savannah State	1926
4. Albany Jr. College	1968*	Albany State	1939
5. Univ. of Maryland - Baltimore County	1966	Morgan State	1891
6. Univ. of Tenn. - Nashville (Now TSU Downtown)	1971	Tenn. State Univ.	1920

*Newly Created state supported institution, that is a 2 year rather than 4 year.

competitor. Such maneuvers have been possible because the generally accepted view throughout higher education has been and continues to be that black institutions are of necessity second rate. This view unfortunately is held by both learned professors and administrators as well as uninitiated freshmen and their parents.

A review of actions by the various states and the higher education forces in those states leads one to the overwhelming conclusion that the end result has been for the most part to avoid developing the historically black colleges and universities as integrated institutions comparable to the other schools in the systems. To add insult to injury, the black schools have often found themselves faced with the major burden for desegregating their state's higher education system (Adams, 1975). The courts take note of the low white enrollment of the state's sole historically black institution, compare it to the black enrollment of the aggregate of the white state institutions and orders the black school to increase its white enrollment. Thus the black public college finds itself faced with the task of attracting white students while at the same time forces in the white community, often including elements of the higher education establishment, either openly encourage whites' ingrained negative attitudes toward enterprises under black management or fail to make any positive effort to dispel unfounded white fears.

It appears that seldom is the idea of the expansion and development of the black college as an institution to serve all students viewed as a viable alternative. Generally, desegregation is seen as a one-way proposition. Even in instances where the most logical step in desegregation is the expansion of the historically black public college, this action is

fought tooth and nail. The case of Tennessee State University is a clear example of this.

Tennessee State University was founded in 1912 as the land-grant institution for black Tennesseans. It is located in Nashville, the state capitol, and was the only state supported, degree granting institution located there until 1971 when the University of Tennessee at Nashville was made a degree granting institution by the Tennessee legislature despite strong opposition from Tennessee State and its supporters.

The University of Tennessee began the expansion of its small evening program in Nashville around 1963, the time when higher education officials began seriously considering the question of the fate of the black colleges and universities. This expansion continued until 1968 when a court challenge was introduced via a lawsuit alleging that this expansion perpetuated the system of segregation.

The court failed to act on the case for nearly ten years. During this intervening decade UTN was allowed to grow and expand. The state of Tennessee reorganized its higher education governing system, and created a coordinating commission-the Tennessee Higher Education Commission - to preserve existing power (Egerton, 1971). This commission actively aided UTN in its expansion while the State Board of Regents, the governing board for the state colleges and universities (excluding UT), including TSU took no action in the interest of TSU and its development as a comprehensive public university (Humphries, 1975).

After ten years in court, countless numbers of attacks on the integrity of TSU and the expenditure of many public dollars, the University of Tennessee at Nashville was merged into the existing TSU on July 1, 1979. The consequences of this, the first merger of a white institution into a black institution, remain to be seen.

Although the majority of black college students are not enrolled in black colleges and universities, there are two important points regarding the broad impact of these schools which must be considered in any policy formulations. The first is their role in the assurance of blacks' continued access to all aspects of higher education and the second is their potential impact on the acceptance and recognition of the black perspective into the American mainstream.

It seems to this writer that these outcomes must be assured if higher education is to be desegregated in any real sense of the word. Relative to the first point, it seems obvious that in any desegregated state system if access is to remain open then blacks must of necessity be represented in the power positions of the higher education system. In all states in which there are black public colleges, the only blacks holding chief executive posts throughout the entire system are the presidents of the historically black school. Add to this the fact that black representation on most governing boards is generally inconsequential. Thus it is not very difficult to see that the desegregation process must be a two way affair.

Some historically black public colleges now have predominately white student bodies. These schools are located for the most part in the border states. However, most black colleges remain predominantly black (Fact-file, 1978). Despite large black student enrollments all of these institutions have experienced increases in the number of white faculty and administrators. This situation has aroused fears of future displacement of black professionals comparable to what occurred in the desegregation of the public schools. The increase in non-black faculty represent responses to court mandates, the non-exclusionary policies of these schools, the dearth of black professionals as well as the perspective of defining desegregation in terms of the proportion of whites to blacks.

Probably the strongest impression one is left with after immersion into the desegregation of higher education is the inadequacy of one set of guidelines to govern desegregation of both formerly white and black institutions. Such a policy fails to recognize that while the end consequences may be similar in both situations, they came to exist by two distinctly different routes - one chosen and the other imposed. It is the failure to recognize this distinction which leads to the development of policies which on the surface appear equitable but have an unseen potential to perpetuate that that they were designed to correct.

References

- Adams, Sterling
1975 "Tennessee Planning for desegregation in public higher education and black citizen reaction and interaction: A critical review of Geier vs. Blanton from a black perspective". In a Working Document on the Crisis in Public Higher Education, Nashville, TN.: Statewide Black Leadership Conference.
- Bowles, Frank and Frank A. DeCosta
1971 Between Two Worlds, New York: McGraw-Hill
- Chronicle of Higher Education
1978 Fact-File, (March 20): 40.
- Egerton, John
1971 The Black Public College: Integration and Disintegration. Nashville, TN.: Race Relations Information Center.
- Fuller, Aaron B.
1978 "The educationalization of America". Chronicle of Higher Education (Oct. 23): 40.
- Humphries, Frederick S.
1975 Memo on the Chronology of Program Development at UTN. Unpublished interuniversity document.
- Jencks, Christopher and David Riseman
1967 "The American Negro College". Harvard Educational Review 47: 37-60
- National Advisory Committee on Black Higher Education and Black Colleges and Universities
1979 Access of Black Americans to Higher Education: How Open is the Door? Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Pettrigrew, Thomas F.
1969 "The Negro and education: Problems and Proposals". Pp. 49-112 in Irvin Katz and Patricia Gurin (eds.) Race and the Social Sciences. New York: Basic Books
- Riggin, Will
1978 "Education for indoctrination and social control". Integrated Education 17: 2-8

- Schuck, Peter H.
1972 "Black land-grant colleges: Discrimination as public policy".
Saturday Review 55: 46-48.
- Tollett, Kenneth S.
1971 "Commentary". Pp. 251-171 in Frank Bowles and Frank DeCosta (eds.)
Between Two Worlds. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Wiggins, Sam P.
1966 The Desegregation Era in Higher Education. Berkely, California:
McCatehan.
- Wright, Stephen J.
1970 "The dilemma of the Negro Colleges: Transition and the brain
drain". Journal of Education 153: 48-58